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TOPONYMIC WEBSITES

Geographical Names of the United States Available on the Internet

Paper submitted by the United States of America**

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Geographical Names of the United States Available on Internet

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The U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is now available via the Internet World Wide Web (WWW). The GNIS WWW site can be found at <http://mapping.usgs.gov/www/gnis>. GNIS, developed by the USGS in cooperation with the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN), is our nation's official repository of domestic geographical names information. The GNIS database lists the Federally recognized name for almost 2 million features located throughout the U.S. GNIS is the vehicle by which the U.S. BGN implements its domestic geographical names standardization program. Only those feature names in the GNIS database can be used on Federally published maps, charts, and documents. The newly developed WWW site enables anyone with access to the Internet to obtain current and accurate information from the GNIS database. All publishers of maps, charts, and other documents now have instant access to Federally approved feature names. The system's utility extends beyond standardizing geographical name usage. The database identifies the location of features by geographical coordinates useful in a wide array of applications. GNIS has helped solve problems in emergency preparedness, delivery and transportation routing, and site selection and analysis, for example. Because historical as well as current documents are researched in compiling the database, genealogists and other researchers of history find the system invaluable. The GNIS database is growing. Names appearing on Federal documents have already been entered into the database. Other sources of information are being researched in an on-going data collection effort. The GNIS WWW site offers online access to the database. Users can query the database by feature name, feature type, State, county, and topographic map reference as well as elevation or population range; and receive information instantaneously. Users can also determine during a query whether the name is a variant of the official name. A file transfer option allows users to quickly and easily obtain standardized digital files by State (gazetteers) from the database. The U.S. file of geographical names in Antarctica is also available at this site and users may submit queries by feature name (including variant names); feature type; and description (includes history) as well as range of elevation, and by defining a minimum bounding rectangle.

The USGS, through development of this WWW site, is making publicly held data more easily and readily accessible. As steward of the GNIS database, USGS is promoting the standardization of domestic geographical nomenclature, and providing a ready and reliable source of feature location information to be used in numerous applications.

The website also provides descriptions and instructions for ordering products featuring both domestic and foreign geographic names. There is a data users guide online and a link to the website of the BGN which provides information about the Board and also displays the publication Principles, Policies, & Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names. There is also a form for submitting name changes and for proposing names for unnamed features.

The GNIS WWW site provides a link to the Geographic Names Processing System (GNPS) developed by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency which contains information about foreign geographical feature names worldwide. Additional links provide access to the geographical names websites in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia with additional links to be provided.

There is a map-based graphical display capability, enabling users to point to specific areas of interest to receive desired information that graphically illustrates location and related feature names as well as a graphical display of stream drainage basin data. Additional improvements and innovations will be added as user needs and suggestions are evaluated.